
HUME ON THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN (*Part 1 of 2*)

Text source:

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,
parts 2-5

CLEANTHES'S STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

- “Look around the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their minutest parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. **The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. ...**”

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CLEANTHES'S STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN (*Continued*)

- “... Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove the existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.” (DCNR, part 2 para 5)
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THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

(advocated by Cleanthes)

1. The Universe resembles an artifact.

(In that it shows a high degree of ordered complexity,
and an apparently purposive organization.)

2. Artifacts are created by designers.

Therefore 3. The Universe was created by a designer.

SOME INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

- First note that the argument *isn't deductively valid*. Its logically possible that the premises are both true but the conclusion false.
 - Rather *it has the character of a probabilistic inference*. The idea is that, given premises 1 and 2, its *probable* (perhaps *very probable*) that the conclusion is true.
 - Hume says that the argument rests on *analogical reasoning*.
 - X is similar to Y in *such-and-such respects* (showing order and complexity), so X is most likely similar to Y in *so-and-so other respects* (being designed) as well.
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FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ARGUMENT

- The advocate of the argument from design generally goes beyond merely asserting that there must be some designer, period.
 - They will typically argue (like Cleanthes) that we are entitled to draw some conclusions about ***what that designer is like***, given the nature of the Creation that He/She/It has produced. For instance, they may argue that, given the evidence from nature of the created Universe, the designer is (very probably) extremely ***intelligent*** and ***powerful, benevolent***, etc...
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AN INITIAL DARWINIAN OBJECTION TO THE ARGUMENT

- **These days it is common to attack the argument from design from the standpoint of Darwinian evolutionary theory:**
 - Initially it looks as if biological organisms must have been designed (their parts all exhibit apparent purposiveness and incredible order and fine-tuned complexity).
(See Cleanthes's eye example, part 3 para.7)
 - But evolutionary theory shows that such complex order can result from blind, non-purposive, non-intelligent forces.
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BUT THIS DARWINIAN MOVE FAILS TO
SETTLE THE MATTER.

CONSIDER THESE POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

**(1) There may be evidence of purposiveness and
design behind evolutionary processes in biology.**

Perhaps a designer is behind the scenes, giving
evolution a guiding hand here and there.

*(Advocates of this line of thinking will typically stress that
some stages of evolution -- such as the initial emergence
of cells -- require such enormously improbable flukes that
it is just not credible that it happened by blind chance. A
designer must have helped with a guiding hand.)*

FURTHER RESPONSES:

(2) Putting aside the apparent marks of design in *biological* systems, in the laws of *chemistry* and *physics* there are also marks of design:

(2a) Consider the elegant structure of molecules and atoms. Don't these resemble artifacts?

(2b) The fact that the natural laws continue to operate in regular fashion itself suggests design. Why is there regularity in the laws rather than total chaos? Answer: Because there is a designer.

(2c) The particular natural laws we happen to have in this universe are extremely conducive to life evolving (as is *a priori* unlikely). Again, this suggests a designer must have fixed the whole thing up from the start.
